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### **Beyond Boundaries: Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome, edited by S.E. Alcock, M. Egri & J.F.D. Frakes**

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**Alcock, S. E., Egri, M., and J. F. D. Frakes, eds, 2015. *Beyond Boundaries: Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*. Los Angeles, Getty Publications. pp. xxi & 386, 106 colour & 78 b/w illustrations, 7 maps. ISBN: 9781696964719. \$69.95.**

While the present volume emerged out of the Getty Foundation's *Arts of Rome's Provinces* seminar, this is more than just a study of 'provincial art'; in fact it is no accident that the terms 'provincial' and 'art' are eschewed entirely in the book's title. Many of the contributions collected here deal with art only in passing (to such a degree that one wonders whether 'material' rather than 'visual' cultures should have been stressed in the title) and indeed the whole question of what we mean by 'provincial', and what a 'province' even is, is a key theme of the volume (notably in the contributions by Jiménez, Sweetman, and Noreña). The *Arts of Rome's Provinces* seminar was the brainchild of Natalie Kampen, to whose memory a warm introduction is dedicated here. The seminar's aim was to bring together scholars from multiple countries, most of them early career researchers, via a series of meetings and, in particular, field trips, to Britain and to Greece (a 'traveling circus' (2), as the editors describe it).

One gets the impression that the range of papers that emerged from this process and that constitute the final volume may have surprised even the editors. Indeed a criticism that could be levelled at this book is that it lacks a clear focus; it is certainly disorientating to shift from a study of Gallic coins to one of the portraits of elite Egyptian boys and then back to a third on sacrificial practices in Gaul. Architecture and ritual practice figure more prominently in a book on 'visual cultures' than one might expect and yet other media are barely touched on – ceramics, for instance, or painting. In practice, of course, this heterogeneity is entirely fitting. To understand how and why visual cultures throughout the Roman empire worked as they did, as almost all of the contributors argue, we need to consider the local contexts in which they operated, the individuals and communities who created them, their priorities, aims and experiences – what Gates-Foster calls their 'lived daily knowledge' (222). This means often moving beyond visual material to consider patterns of consumption, of religious practice, and of place-making. A key theme unites almost all of the contributions: a clear rejection of any model that sees the art of Rome's provinces and surrounding regions as wholly dependent on metropolitan models. Rome, in fact, barely figures; as Jiménez notes, in the first paper of the volume, 'Rome was not an essential part of the equation' (24), even in Italy, and many of the connections between regions traced in this volume bypassed the city entirely.

Where a more traditional study of 'provincial art' might attempt an all-encompassing survey of visual material from each province, this volume is structured around four main themes: approaches to provincial contexts; tradition, innovation, manipulation; networks, movements, meanings; local accents in the imperial context. There is not space here to summarise the contents of each of these sections and provide an appraisal of each contribution to this volume. Instead, I want to highlight some of the key threads of argument that connect individual papers and in doing so examine the most important contributions presented here.

The idea of 'entanglement' – that material goods are not only revealing of networks of contacts but that they also actively shape these networks – is touched upon frequently. Gates-Foster turns away from visual material altogether, considering the diverse range imported commodities at the Red Sea ports of Berenike and Myos Hormos as a case study

for the way in which imported commodities could be received and displayed differently in highly localised contexts. The peppercorns used for ritual purposes in the Temple of Serapis are used to argue for the 'embedding [of] a foreign commodity into community observances' (229). The point here is that local context matters above all else: this pepper was not used because it was symbolic of India or because it was desirable at Rome; it was used at Berenike in a way it was not in either India or Rome because it was both valued as an expensive commodity that had a particular significance to a wide swath of the community whose livelihood relied on goods like pepper. Varying patterns of interaction with material culture is a theme that also emerges in Revell's paper on the so-called *plantae pedum*. These inscribed plaques depicting pairs of feet with accompanying dedications to Isis are employed by Revell to examine the 'role of artworks in tying the people of the provinces into a wider cultural community, and their role in the process of change' (207). Such images, it is argued, reveal the connections between communities of worshippers across the Roman world but also the way in which the practices of these groups were integrated into mainstream Roman culture. At the same time, the dedicators of these panels and the representation of the feet on them varies considerably by location: at Baelo Claudia, the dedicators are both men, at Dion the combination of large and small feet suggest a focus on the parent-child relationship, while at Italica most of the dedicators are women. At Italica, in addition, Revell shows how the use of *plantae pedum* was extended to other cults, including those of Caelestis and Nemesis, in a way not seen at Baelo Claudia and Dion. These *plantae pedum* suggest links between communities, therefore, but also highlight processes of active reinterpretation and adaptation.

Some of these same themes emerge in McCarty's discussion of the worship of Baal Hammon and Saturn in North Africa. Arguing against an overly static and typological definition of syncretism that simply pairs deities together, McCarty suggests that how 'sanctuary users created their world full of gods' (267) in this region depended on a variety of discrete processes and varies considerably between places. There is no 'double naming' of deities in North Africa and language use seems to have decided how the god was identified (Baal Hammon in Punic and Saturn in Latin). The imagery associated with the god, furthermore, was never hybridised: when described as Saturn he is shown as a male figure, of a range of ages, often crowned or enthroned; when described as Baal he tends not to be shown, with the inscription instead being accompanied by a range of ritual symbols. McCarty is not the only scholar in this volume to identify a distinct lack of hybridity in the material he examines. Ahuja turns east from the Roman empire to Gandhara, and specifically to a statue of the Buddhist goddess Hārītī in the British Museum. This second-century statue preserves a typical image of the goddess combined with various images of children seemingly derived from western models: Ahuja identifies a Harpokrates, a seated boy who compares well to temple boy statuettes from Cypriot and Levantine sanctuaries associated with the god Eshmun, a pair of wrestling boys who might be the Dioscuri, and another pair who could be connected to Zoroastrian deities. The point here is that this is not a hybrid image – the individual characteristics of these figures are not elided but rather celebrated for their distinctiveness.

Several other contributors look beyond the Roman empire. Wicker's paper on fourth-century medallions from Germany and Scandinavia traces the way in which these objects seem to have acquired status, were imitated, and later acted as inspiration for the Nordic bracteates, thin gold discs, of the fifth and sixth centuries. These bracteates combined image and text, like the Roman medallions, but also adapted the imagery to more

local tastes, placing a greater emphasis on geometric borders and more stylised imagery. This insistence on local tastes is also explored in Cassibry's paper on pre-Roman Gallic coinage. These coins, it is argued, reveal the choices made by their commissioners in a period of transformation. By the first century BCE, coins across multiple Gallic regions begin to incorporate distinctively Gallic elements into their iconography and increasingly move away from their initially Greek-inspired forms. Isolated heads, boars, perhaps torques, begin to make an appearance on Amorican coins, for instance. In other areas, however, more dramatic stylistic innovation is apparent. The Parisii integrate far more decorative, abstract designs into their coinage, drawing on other forms of decorative metalwork and transforming the Classical figure types on which their iconography draws. Some of this abstraction can even be found in Aeduan coinage, which is nevertheless more clearly influenced by Roman models. Cassibry talks of this mix of Gallic, Greek and Roman iconography and style as an entanglement that shifted over a long period.

A significant thread that connects several papers in this volume, somewhat refreshingly, is the role of the individual maker and the related discussions of authorship and even quality. In Wootton's paper, Roman mosaicists, their working practices, and what we can tell about their lives are used to examine the relationship between maker and commissioner. These makers not only responded to the demands of a varied range of consumers but also acted as links between regions, carrying with them styles and motifs and so disseminating knowledge about their craft. How this process might have worked is revealed by the example of the slave Amor, mentioned on a fourth-century mosaic from Lillebonne, who appears to be from a local tribe but works with a mosaicist from Puteoli. The role of individuals and how their choices shaped artistic output is a topic picked up by Hijmans too. Highlighting monuments on which seemingly mismatched styles are employed alongside each other, he argues that divergence from the Classical canon should be regarded as a matter of choice and not a result of artistic incompetence. Different artistic styles coexisted throughout the provinces but also, crucially, at Rome itself. Tackling the question of style straight on, Hijmans rejects the idea that Greek art should be the barometer by which all ancient art is measured and attempts to extend Hölscher's semantic system to provincial art. Quality is also the main focus of Mladenović's paper. Unlike most contributors to this volume, Mladenović argues that artists in the region she considers, Moesia Superior, did draw primarily on the Roman canon, especially for the form and decoration of funerary stelai and for statue types. The range of motifs employed on these monuments, however, is fairly restricted, while the quality of execution, Mladenović argues, is generally mediocre. Stone sculpture and figural modes of expression were new to this region and it would appear that demand for such work was neither large nor sustained enough to ever allow the craft to become fully embedded. Was this bad art? Mladenović provocatively raises the question but also shows that we need to be careful not to draw broader socio-cultural conclusions from artistic media that were only limitedly adopted. Conscious rejection of figurative art across much of Moesia Superior cannot be ruled out and in her paper on Celtic art in Roman Britain, Walker makes a similar point. A general 'lack of interest' (194) in figurative forms extends well beyond the Roman period in Britain. Against this background, the series of striking bronzes showing Roman emperors and deities – among them the Marcus Aurelius from Steane that graces the cover of this volume – stand apart. These pieces represent clearly identifiable subjects, though the handling of certain details of their design shows Celtic influence: the treatment of the beard and moustache on the head of Marcus Aurelius, and the inlaid glass of the eyes.

While the majority of the contributions in this volume concentrate very closely on a single region and are concerned above all with highly localised patterns of display – a phenomenon that Morton, in his paper on monumental architecture at Meninx and Timgad, explores through the theoretical lens of ‘critical regionalism’ (281) – not everywhere do we find variety. Indeed both Noreña and Di Napoli identify patterns of behaviour that suggest a degree of inter-regional homogeneity. Using the Augustan coinage of Antioch, Noreña argues that expressions of local identity and heritage were here fully integrated into an imperial framework. Like most eastern cities, Antioch deployed a range of unique identifiers on its coins to foreground its perceived heritage (its *tyche*, references to the Orontes, and to the metropolis of the Antiochenes) but always alongside images of the emperor; what was being emphasised might have been local and distinctive, therefore, but the fact of its emphasis and the way in which it was communicated was typical of the Roman East. Greek heritage is again explored by Di Napoli in her study of what versions of *nobilis opera* – Greek sculptural masterpieces – signified when deployed in Roman Greece. Her conclusion is that Greek collectors of these pieces used them in the same way as elites across the Roman world and that there is no distinctly Greek reception of these works. This pair of contributions, the last two in the volume, remind us that while particular modes of visual display were often highly localised in the Roman world, broad inter-regional trends were also at work, with the former very often fitting into the latter – a concept at the very heart of the theory of globalization; ‘everything is local’, to quote Gates-Foster (229), but in examining the local we should not always expect difference.

In sum, the contributions to the volume demonstrate repeatedly that broad terms like ‘Roman’ and ‘indigenous’ offer little clarity and in general serve only to efface the highly localised and often unpredictably messy variety that one encounters on archaeological sites and in museum collections across area of the Roman empire. This volume is more successful than any other is teasing out key observations from this mess without sweeping away its complexity. It is certainly not an easy read and I suspect that most scholars and students will end up dipping in and out of it rather than reading it cover to cover. One minor criticism: many of these studies are very brief, and more than one author apologizes for this fact; at least one describes their contribution as a ‘sample study’. Some of these studies will probably be developed further elsewhere but it would have been helpful to see that development here. Aside from the wrong coin being shown in fig. 18.1, I noted no errors. Overall, the volume is beautifully presented and very reasonably priced. It will certainly become a standard reference work for students of Roman visual culture but will hopefully also stimulate further research into the diverse range of topics touched on here.